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**Cibola
National
Forest and
National
Grasslands**

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Forest Products Specialist Report

Kiowa, Rita Blanca, Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands Plan Revision

Environmental Impact Statement Analysis

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Executive Summary

Alternative A (No Action) would continue activities as they are currently being managed. This alternative gives very little direction in management of forest products other than, "Current plan directs that areas should be evaluated for their suitability for firewood gathering and that firewood gathering would not be allowed in designated RNAs." This Alternative would continue to provide forest products to the public but with no emphasis or clear direction that would develop projects for the purpose of providing for forest products.

Alternative B emphasizes the direction for what is currently being implemented at the project level through proposed actions and prescriptions. This Alternative provides more concise direction on when forest products would be generated from projects with an emphasis on forest products as by-product of treatments that move the ecosystems towards desired conditions. Alternative B direction states, "Grasslands would provide firewood, fuelwood and wildlings when consistent with meeting desired conditions. Individual firewood permits for personal use would be limited to the amounts typically needed for domestic household use in a year's time if firewood is limited. Firewood and other personal use forest products would be offered free when fee permits are not practical. Managers recognize the right of Tribes to collect forest products for non-commercial traditional and cultural purposes. Forest Products plan components are not applicable to wilderness."

Alternative C is the same as A and B, except this alternative would recommend Wilderness Area in a portion of what is now the Mills Canyon Inventoried Roadless Area. However, this alternative would not differ in environmental consequences from A or B due to the fact that presently forest products are not gathered from the Mills Canyon Inventoried Roadless Area.

Overview of the Affected Environment

A small portion of the grasslands contains pinyon pine and juniper (pinyon-juniper) woodlands on the western half of the Kiowa NG and mixed-hardwood woodlands encroaching on the BK NG. Over the past 60 to 80 years, dependence on wood products has declined as lifestyles shifted from subsistence to ranching. There is a relatively low demand by rural residents for posts, poles, and firewood, and for vigas and latillas that are occasionally used as home building materials.

The supply of firewood on the grasslands is dependent on the amount of wood that has been thinned by grassland employees or contractors. On the KRB, cut down trees are left at thinning sites for the public to remove. This is a cost-effective way to meet ecological objectives.

The Kiowa NG provides just over 100 cords per year for sale. Market value has been about $100 per cord, yielding revenues of about $10,000 per year. Demand is not expected to greatly increase, as the human population near the pinyon-juniper woodlands is low and declining.

Even though the supply of available wood on the Kiowa NG has fluctuated between 200 and 600 acres during the period from 1998 to 2005, it has been adequate to meet the demand for wood from this remote area. It is projected that the supply will continue to adequately meet firewood

demand in this area as thinning is expected to continue in order to meet ecological objectives. Currently, about 500 to 900 acres of pinyon-juniper that are overstocked and encroaching onto the shortgrass prairie are thinned annually.

The BK NG has designated areas where the public may remove undesirable mixed hardwood trees for firewood. Although supply far outweighs demand, this activity helps to restore the native grassland ecosystem while providing a wood product. Average volume in mixed hardwood stands that are no longer needed as windbreaks or have escaped the original footprints of shelterbelts or windbreaks is about 941 cubic feet per acre (7.35 cords per acre). Some of the tree rows planted to Osage orange after the Dust Bowl have also been or are currently being harvested for posts.

Even though employment income associated with woodcutting activities is negligible, it provides a resource that is important to individuals who rely on the cheap availability of these products to subsist. The gathering of wood products has not shown to be in conflict with other uses on the grasslands, and demand for this activity is not projected to increase or decrease significantly in the future.

Summary of Environmental Consequences

Environmental consequences incurred in providing forest products would include potential impacts to soils from the gathering of products, for example, user created roads, soil compaction, disturbance of established ground vegetation and disturbance of established wildlife feature such as nest or burrows. Common to all alternatives, theses consequences would be mitigated through the following methods 1) administration of permits and contracts, 2) limiting of forest product gathering during seasonal wet periods and 3) limiting gathering during wildlife breeding and foraging periods.

Also common to all alternatives. Pinyon-juniper forest products would be available to the public.

Under alternatives B and C. invasive tree forest products would be available on 1,000 to 2,000 acres on the BK NG. Forest product availability would be limited in the pinyon-juniper vegetation type on the KRB NGs from April 15 to July 31.

Under alternative C, removal of some forest products could be prohibited in the potential wilderness area, even by non-motorized, non-mechanical methods.

Specialist Report

Introduction

This report discloses and evaluates the potential environmental consequences on the Forest Products resource that may result with the adoption of a revised land management plan. It examines, in detail, three different alternatives for revising the management direction from the 1985 Cibola National Forest Land Management Plan (only that which is relevant to the National Grasslands).

Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Policy that Apply

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

National Forest Management Act of 1976

Tribal Consultation on Section 8105 of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008

36 CFR part 223, 261 Sale and Disposal of National Forest System Timber; Special Forest Products and Forest Botanical Products

Forest Service Handbook 2409.18 Timber Sale Preparation

Forest Service Handbook 2409.19 Renewable Resources

Forest Service Handbook 2409.15 Timber Sale Administration

Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 National Environmental Policy Act

36 CFR 223.1 Authority to Sell Timber

36 CFR 223.2 Disposal of Timber for Administrative Use

36 CFR 223.5 Scope of Free Use Granted to Individuals

36 CFR 223.6 Cutting and removal of Timber in Free-use Areas

36 CFR 223.7 Permission for Free Use of Timber outside Free-use Areas

36 CFR 223.8 Delegations of Authority to Approve Free-use by Individuals

Forest Service Manual 2431

Forest Service Manual 2463

Forest Service Manual 2467

Forest Service Manual 2462

16 U.S.C 2104 Note Stewardship Contracts and Agreements

Methodology and Analysis Process

The plan components (ie., objectives, suitability, guidelines, standards, and monitoring elements) and management approaches of other resource areas were evaluated against the desired conditions for Forest Products to determine if achieving the desired conditions was affected positively, negatively, or not at all.

Conversations were had at various times between myself, the Black Kettle District Staff and Supervisor Office personnel discussing the existing condition where black locust and eatern red cedar are encroaching on the grassland areas.

I have made several site visits to Mills Canyon over the past 2.5 years to assess the existing condition, especially in pinion juniper areas located on the rim of the canyon.

Assumptions

In the analysis for this resource, the following assumptions have been made:

- The land management plan provides a programmatic framework for future site-specific actions.
- Land management plans do not have direct effects. They do not authorize or mandate any site-specific projects or activities (including ground-disturbing actions).
- Land management plans may have implications, or environmental consequences, of managing the forests under a programmatic framework.
- The plan decisions (desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management areas, monitoring) will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
- Law, policy, and regulations will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
- Monitoring will occur and the land management plan will be amended, as needed.
- We will be funded similar to past budget levels (past 5 years).
- The planning timeframe is 15 years; other timeframes may be analyzed depending on the resource (usually a discussion of anticipated trends into the future).

Revision Topics Addressed in this Analysis

Existing laws, regulations, and policies provide the legal direction for the management and disposal of forest products. The desired condition for forest products in this revision is to continue to provide for them where they are by-products of projects that are meeting other desired conditions of the plan, such as removing non-native tree species or where thinning pinion juniper improves wildlife habitat and/or improves watershed conditions. Unless existing laws, regulations and policies that grant the Forest Service the authority to dispose of forest products drastically change, then the desired condition would be met as described in Alternative B and C.

Summary of Alternatives

1) Alternative A allows for the disposal of forest products through sales or free-use but gives little direction of where or for what purpose other than areas

should be evaluated for their suitability for firewood gathering and that firewood gathering would not be allowed in designated RNAs.

2) Alternative B would provide direction for the disposal of forest products through sales or free-use and would give clear direction on when and how disposal would occur. Grasslands would provide firewood, fuelwood and wildlings when consistent with meeting desired conditions. Individual firewood permits for personal use would be limited to the amounts typically needed for domestic household use (typically about 12 cords) in a year's time if firewood is limited. Firewood and other personal use forest products would be offered free when fee permits are not practical. Managers would recognize the right of Tribes to collect forest products for non-commercial traditional and cultural purposes.

3) Alternative C would be similar to Alternative B except C would recommend a Canadian River Wilderness Area. The recommended Wilderness Area would have no direct impact on the desired conditions to provide for forest products because the proposed wilderness area is a current Inventoried Roadless Area where product removal does not occur due to restrictions on tree cutting and removal within an IRA without the Secretary of Agriculture's approval.

Description of Affected Environment (Existing Condition)

A small portion of the Grasslands contains "forested" areas consisting of piñon pine and juniper (piñon-juniper) woodlands on the western half of the Kiowa National Grassland and black locust woodlands encroaching on the mixed grass prairie of Black Kettle National Grassland.. Over the past 60 to 80 years, the level of dependence on wood products has declined as lifestyles shifted from subsistence to an agricultural ranching lifestyle. There is a relatively low demand by rural residents for posts, poles and firewood, and for vigas and latillas that are occasionally used as home-building materials.

The supply of firewood on the Grasslands is dependant on the amount of wood that has been thinned by Grassland employees. Employees leave the cut-down trees at thinning sites for the public to remove. This is a cost-effective way to meet ecological objectives.

The Kiowa National Grassland provides an average of 10-30 cords per year for (free) personal use and just over 100 cords per year for sale. Market value has been approximately $100/cord, yielding revenues of approximately $10,000/year (USDA Forest Service 2005b). Demand is not expected to greatly increase as populations near the piñon-juniper woodlands are quite low and continuing to decline.

Even though the supply of available wood on the Kiowa National Grassland has fluctuated between 200 and 600 acres during the period 1998-2005., it has been adequate to meet the demand for wood from this remote area. It is projected that the supply will continue to adequately meet firewood demand in this area as thinning is expected to continue in order to meet ecological objectives. Stands of piñon-juniper that are overstocked and encroaching onto the shortgrass

prairie are being treated using thinning and prescribed burning. Currently, the level of treatment is approximately 500-900 acres of thinning a year

On the Black Kettle National Grasslands, there are designated areas where the public may remove black locust trees for firewood. Although supply far outweighs demand, providing for this activity helps reduce the prevalence of this invasive tree to restore the native grassland ecosystem while providing a wood product. Average volume in black locust stands that no longer are needed as windbreaks or have escaped the original footprints of shelterbelts or windbreaks is estimated at approximately 941 cubic feet peracre (7.35 cords per acre). It is estimated that up to 1,000 acres of black locust trees would be masticated for chips or harvested for fire wood or posts or other products for each of the next two 10-year time periods and 500 acres in the third time period. Some of the tree rows planted to Osage orange after the Dust Bowl have also been or are currently being harvested for posts.

Even though employment income associated with wood cutting activities is negligible (UNM-BBER 2005), it provides a resource that is important to individuals who rely on the cheap availability of these products to subsist. The gathering of wood products has not shown to be in conflict with other uses on the Grasslands and demand for this activity is not projected to increase or decrease significantly in the future.

Environmental Consequences

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carryout any project or activity. Because the land management plan does not authorize or mandate any site-specific activities or ground-disturbing actions there can be no direct effects. However, there may be implications, or longer term environmental consequences, of managing the forests under this programmatic framework.

Environmental consequences incurred in providing forest products would include potential impacts to soils from the gathering of products, for example, user created roads, soil compaction, disturbance of established ground vegetation and disturbance of established wildlife feature such as nest or burrows. Common to all alternatives, theses consequences would be mitigated through the following methods 1) administration of permits and contracts, 2) limiting of forest product gathering during seasonal wet periods and 3) limiting gathering during wildlife breeding and foraging periods.

Also common to all alternatives. Pinyon-juniper forest products would be available to the public.

Under alternatives B and C. invasive tree forest products would be available on 1,000 to 2,000 acres on the BK NG. Forest product availability would be limited in the pinyon-juniper vegetation type on the KRB NGs from April 15 to July 31.

Under alternative C, removal of some forest products could be prohibited in the potential wilderness area, even by non-motorized, non-mechanical methods.

Cumulative Environmental Consequences

There are no known cumulative environmental consequences regarding special forest products.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carryout any project or activity. Before any ground-disturbing actions take place, they must be authorized in a subsequent environmental analysis. Therefore none of the alternatives cause unavoidable adverse impacts.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carryout any project or activity. Because the land management plan does not authorize or mandate any ground-disturbing actions, none of the alternatives cause an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

Adaptive Management

All alternatives assume the use of adaptive management principles. Forest Service decisions are made as part of an on-going process, including planning, implementing projects, and monitoring and evaluation. The land management plan identifies a monitoring program. Monitoring the results of actions will provide a flow of information that may indicate the need to change a course of action or the land management plan. Scientific findings and the needs of society may also indicate the need to adapt resource management to new information. The Forest Supervisor annually evaluates the monitoring information displayed in the evaluation reports through a management review and determines if any changes are needed in management actions or the plan itself. In general, annual evaluations of the monitoring information consider the following questions:

- What are the effects of resource management activities on the productivity of the land?
- To what degree are resource management activities maintaining or making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives for the plan?
- What changes are needed to account for unanticipated changes in conditions?

In addition to annual monitoring and evaluation, the Forest Supervisor reviews the conditions on the land covered by the plan at least every 5 years to determine whether conditions or demands of the public have changed significantly. The forest plan is ordinarily revised on a 10-year cycle and the Forest Supervisor may amend the plan at any time.

Consistency with Law, Regulation, and Policy

All alternatives are designed to guide the Kiowa, Rita Blanca, Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands' management activities in meeting federal law, regulations, and policy.

Other Planning Efforts

There are no potential conflicts between the proposed action and objectives of federal, regional, state forest assessments or state wildlife action plans, local or tribal land use plans.

List of Preparers

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Bachelor Degree of Science in Forestry "Resource Management", University of Tennessee 1998.

I began my career with Forest Service in 1999 as a seasonal timber marker and cruiser for 1999 and 2000 field seasons. I also worked for the Colorado State Forest Service in the winter of 1999 writing a Land Management Plan for parcel of State Land. In 2001 I became a Forester for the Florida Division of Forestry on Goethe State Forest specializing in timber sale preparation, timber sale administration, reforestation and prescribe burning. In 2002 I became a Forester on the Prescott National Forest in Arizona specializing in timber sale and mechanical restoration contracts, timber sale cruise designs, program management duties and budget. In 2008 I moved to the Cibola National Forest in New Mexico as the Collaborative Restoration Program Coordinator specializing in administering grants and agreements related to fuel reduction and restoration activities. In 2009 I was promoted on the Cibola National Forest to the Forestry Program Manager specializing in supervision of the forestry organization, program management and budget.